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UD PROFESSOR COMMENTS ON THE LATEST AFRICAN-AMERICAN SMOKING STUDY, TOBACCO SETTLEMENT

STUDY FAULTY IN THE HYPOTHESIS IT RAISES – A recent study on African-American smokers, which suggests they experience stronger addiction to nicotine than do whites, may lead people to draw the wrong conclusion, says Vernellia Randall, a University of Dayton law professor. "The hypothesis put forth by the media from this study has been that cigarette addiction may be physiological, biological or genetic, and I have a problem with that. It puts the blame and behavior on the victim."

On the contrary, Randall points to the tobacco companies themselves and their co-conspirator – Madison Avenue marketing. That African Americans account for 80 to 90 percent of the menthol cigarette market could very well be the reason they appear more sensitive to nicotine than other smokers, Randall believes. "Because menthol has a cooling effect, it allows the smoker to not only take the nicotine in deeper but to hold it longer, thus there is greater exposure to the drug." Randall, a former public health nurse, also embraces another theory that suggests combining the two drugs (methanol, a type of alcohol, and nicotine) may have a compounding effect on nicotine."

Randall admits she is unable to either prove or disprove her theory because the tobacco companies simply refuse to release any research related to the African-American smoker. "We know that the cigarette companies started marketing menthol cigarettes to African Americans in the 1960s and have continued to do so," Randall says. "I believe they had research at the time showing that menthol cigarettes could increase the level of harm and the level of addiction to smokers, and (the companies) should ultimately be held responsible for their actions."

SETTLEMENT AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN SMOKERS – "No settlement should go forward until all documents are released, especially those that target African Americans and show the biomedical impact on this community," Randall says. "The settlement's focus has almost entirely been on reducing youth smoking and there are some side benefits for the African-American community. It calls for the removal of outdoor advertising, which has been one of the ways cigarette companies have used for targeting African-Americans."

And while other aspects of the settlement could help reduce the number of African-American smokers, such as banning advertising from magazines that attract young people, Randall says they're too ambiguous to be effective. "You have adult-oriented magazines, such as *Ebony*, *Jet* and *Essence*, that attract young people too. Well, under the settlement, cigarette companies would still be allowed to advertise in these magazines."

While the current tobacco settlement appears "dead in the water," Randall believes the next to come along will be similar to its predecessor in its failure to address particular African-American issues as they relate to smoking. "African Americans smoke less than whites and other groups but have a stronger addiction to nicotine, and, therefore, suffer from it greater."

For media interviews, contact **Vernellia Randall** at (937) 229-3379 or via e-mail at randall@odo.law.udayton.edu. For material on health issues for African Americans, see her Web page at <http://homepages.udayton.edu/~randall/>.